

This Month in Moravian History

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The Kralice Bible



This year Protestants in the Czech Republic celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Kralice Bible, a complete translation of the Bible from the original text into the Czech language. The Bible was translated by leading scholars of the Unity of the Brethren and printed in their printshop in Kralice in Southern Moravia.

The Kralice Bible became the standard translation of the Bible into Czech. It influenced the Czech language similar to the King James Version's influence on the English language and Luther's translation with the German language. The Kralice Bible was not the first Czech translation of the Bible. Over the years, several attempts had been made. Since they were often based upon Latin texts and not from the original biblical languages, these translations were unsatisfactory.

During the sixteenth century the Unity of the Brethren, the precursor of the Moravian Church, was instrumental in translating the Bible into Czech. Jan Blahoslav (1523-1571), bishop of the Unity, translated the New Testament from the original Greek in 1564.

In 1577 work on translating the Old Testament began. Between 1579 and 1588 five volumes were published; Blahoslav's translation of the New Testament was added in 1593 so the complete original edition comprises six volumes. In addition to the biblical text, the volumes contain historical introductions and many interpretive notes are placed in the margins of the pages.

Zachariáš Šolín oversaw the printing process. Jan von Žerotín, the local lord at Kralice, financed the project. In 1596 a one-volume, second edition without the extensive notes and introductions was printed. In 1613 a revised edition came out, again without the notes. The revised text of 1613 became the standard text for the Czech Bible for centuries to come.

The Moravian Archives in Bethlehem owns a complete original six-volume edition of 1579-1593. It was handed down among descendants of Frank Travníček Nechuta (ca. 1814-1901), who acquired the set when owning a copy of this Protestant Bible translation was still illegal in the Czech lands. The following account is given on how he discovered a Kralice Bible in the possession of a Catholic family in Moravia:

"About 1845-1850, Frank Nechuta, my Great Grandfather, on my Mother's side, an active member of a Church in Vanovice, near Borotin, his birth place, learned of a six volume Kralitz Bible owned by friends. After some hesitation he was permitted to see the Bible. So, in the night, a tin box was dug up in the garden

containing a well preserved Kralitz Bible. His heart's desire was to own such a set. After several visits and a liberal amount of money, the purchase was made. The next problem was how to transfer the Bible to his home. Sacks, filled with hay, into which, one by one, the six volumes were carried to his home." Nechuta emigrated to America in 1852 and brought his Kralice Bible with him. The set was handed down in the family until Rev. Andrew P. Slabey purchased it from Lillie Svacha, granddaughter of Frank Nechuta. In 1952 Slabey sold the set to the Moravian Archives.

The set is in relatively good condition although there are clear signs of use. Parts of pages are missing and some pages have been torn out. Throughout the Bible there are handwritten notes with information on the Klattovsky family, the family that kept the Bible hidden in their backyard. This year's celebration commemorates the final, third edition of the Bible from 1613.



Sources

Images: opening page of Gospel of Mark; Kralice in 1928. J. Th. Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder* 3 (1931). Craig D. Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren* (2009)